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
THE SEVEN QUESTS OF MAN

(THE QUEST FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD)

Beloved Companion:

In Lecture-lesson 90, you received a five color representation of the Mayan Symbol of Being and an explanation, in brief, of 16 of the symbols composing it. Intensive study of the Symbol of Being will repay you richly, as it is a tool for use in your personal philosophic thinking. Understand all that these lessons have taught about it and work with it as a tool, and it will lead your thoughts to new discoveries that you are capable of making.

There are many other symbols within this one grand symbol beyond the 16 discussed in Lecture-lesson 90. At the top of the frontispiece of that lesson, for example, is a four-colored depiction of the Symbol of Being, whose center and heart is a cross.

The cross, as you know, is one of the world's most ancient symbols, and in deepest antiquity was found in all parts of the world. The ancient Swastika (wrongfully appropriated by Hitler) was also found all over the world, but most frequently in ancient America. The Swastika also appears in its dual form, both  and , in the Mayan Symbol of Being. See if you can find them. Then try to read them, from what you know of the four parts of Being.

A few challenging terms have always lingered in the background of human thinking. One of them is Summum Bonum, meaning the highest good. What is it, and how may it be attained? These are questions that have interested thoughtful minds throughout the history of the human race.

We are all really idealists at heart. Those who talk glibly of being concerned only with things as they usually are give some secret thought to things as they might be. We all know that while life as it is, is good, it might be better, and that somewhere up the road of the better life must stand the shining goal of life at its best. However stoutly we deny it, we all really want to travel that road and reach that goal.

It is not an easy matter to determine just what is the highest good and how to attain it. One realizes that when he reads even a little of the age-long views

and discussions of the question. Convincing arguments have been made for widely varying viewpoints and, of course, they cannot all be right.

An argument can be so convincing, and still not be sound; and a plan may sound ever so promising, and still not be workable. This is the kind of thing which must be proved in order to be successful. We must think it out the best we can, but above all we must test various ways of attainment. The one that works, and that really carries us in the direction of what we want, will be the right one. It may not have been one of those that sounded the best in theory.

We may assume that the highest good is somehow linked up with the good life. But what is really the good life? That is a debated question too, a fact which at least shows that a great many people are concerned about the question and its answer.

About the turn of the century, Charles Wagner, the pastor of a church in Paris, was proclaiming an answer to the question. His preaching centered largely in the idea that the good life is the simple life. He wrote a book on the subject which was widely discussed and made a strong public impression in its day. No doubt, simplicity would be one of the phases of the good life, but it would not be the whole answer to the problem.

About the same time, Theodore Roosevelt, then the President of the United States, was preaching another kind of life as the good life. It was the strenuous life he championed, and he was himself a good example of the benefits of vigorous and active living. Certainly a strenuous life is good for those adapted to it, but it cannot be said to be the whole of the good life.

Bertrand Russell, the English philosopher and mathematician, has also contributed an answer to the endless discussion. He has said the good life is life guided by reason and motivated by love. As might be expected of so brilliant a mind, his is a thoughtful answer and at least comes nearer to being adequate and complete than the others.

Considering the supreme importance attached to love by St. Paul in the Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians, we may assume that it would be fundamental in anything approaching the good life. It is the one motive we know to be wholly good.

Yet, Russell points out that the love motive is not enough. That is because love is not always reasonable, not always even thoughtful. It knows what it wants, and it is likely to consider nothing but the accomplishment of its own purpose. Many romances and friendships are spoiled by the failure of love to function in the light of reason. Therefore we might say that Russell's definition of the good life is a good start, but that it is only a start.

Jesus of Nazareth dealt with the question again and again. It appears in His discourses and conversations all the way through the New Testament Gospels. The so-called sermon on the mount is really an extended answer to it, but His idea of the good life is probably put most compactly in the passage we call the Great Commandment. To love the Infinite Being with all one's heart, and soul, and mind, and to love one's neighbor as one loves himself, is probably as good an answer as

we shall ever have.

Among the modern definitions of the highest good is that which calls it the best possible life in the best possible world. This and all the others, however, will be found flowering from the practical observance of the Great Commandment.

People report two troubles with the keeping of that formula. First, it is easy to emphasize the one or the other of its two provisions and minimize the other. The humanist may shout from the housetops that we must love our neighbors as ourselves, all the while forgetting that the power to do that must grow from loving God with all our hearts, and souls, and minds. The religious enthusiast may proclaim loudly the importance of loving God, and tend to forget that love for God is never complete until it finds its expression in love for one's fellowmen.

The other difficulty people have with the Great Commandment is in the idea that it is hard, not to say impossible, to love one's neighbor as he loves himself. This is no difficulty if we are practical about it. The Commandment does not say we must think about our neighbors as much as we do ourselves, or give them as much attention, or be as enthusiastic about their affairs. It means that if we hope to get on well we must see to it that our neighbors get on well too, for in the final analysis we must stand or fall together.

No one can afford to have his neighbor in need or trouble, or to have anything out of adjustment in his neighborhood; or for that matter to have anything wrong anywhere on earth. The health of one's self and family depends on general health conditions. Individual welfare depends on general prosperity. All through the list it would be found that one must think of and work for his neighbor's interest as well as his own, if he wants his own interest to be secure. The question is not whether one can afford to keep the Great Commandment, but whether he can afford not to keep it.

The reader may accept the definition of Jesus, or prefer some other one, or work out one of his own, or make a combination of all of them. Whatever he does, each of these approaches will shed some light on the road. He may reject them all, and insist on starting from the beginning in his search for the highest good. It is better to make USE of what light is already available; but whether one does or not, if he makes a reverent and sincere search he WILL find the object of his quest, but he will discover also that what he has after all is the formula of the Great Teacher.

In any case, PRAYER will be one of the means to be used. Any good must come from HARMONY with the universe and the Infinite, and prayer is the most effective means.

Do not make the mistake of being too specific in your praying for the realization of the highest good in your life. You may think you know what is the highest good for you, and you may be right about it, but you also may be wrong. Do not tell the Heavenly Father what your highest good is, for He knows better than you. Just ask, and keep on asking that the highest good for you, WHATEVER it is, may be REALIZED in YOUR life. What happens may not be what you are looking for, but it will be what is right - for you.

You will have no trouble at this point if you bear in mind that

prayer is not a means of bringing God's will into harmony with ours, but of bringing our wills into harmony with God's. It is not a means of getting something changed, or something given to us, or something done for us. It is a means of bringing us into that relation to life where things work out rightly, so that nothing is lacking and nothing is out of order. This is itself an ideal path toward the highest good - for you.

We may not know just what the highest good is. Perhaps we cannot, for it would be something different for each of us. We do not need to, for its realization is the business of the Ruler of the Universe. Our business is to cooperate in its achievement, and to accept it when it appears.

But we can determine certain general principles that will help to bring us into the right condition and position to receive our highest good. One of them is that it must lie somewhere along the path of good will. Since Paul says that love is the greatest thing in the world, and since good will toward men is applied brotherly love, the way of good will must be the way to our highest good. The angels' song the night the Babe of Bethlehem was born would lead us to think that too.

Another road that must lead to the highest good is the way of constructive service. This is closely associated with good will, except that not all service growing out of good will is really constructive. What one does for mankind should, as Bertrand Russell said, be guided by reason. It must be really helpful and have lifting and healing power. The person who walks the way of real helpfulness to others does more than improve conditions about himself. He also changes himself for the better. Such a road must lead to the highest good somewhere up the heights.

We need to understand that no man's highest good can be contradictory to that of anyone else. It would be most unfortunate if all our prayers were granted or all our desires gratified. We sometimes want and ask for things that would be very detrimental to us or to others. No one can really and finally profit from anything that injures another. A prayer for one's own individual highest good would be greatly strengthened, it would seem, by joining it with a petition for the highest good of each member of the human race and for the human race itself.

That is why it is wrong to covet or steal. We must not wish to benefit from the disadvantage of others. We must rather seek to share in the common benefit of all. It is hard to see how anyone could realize his highest good in his life without having the collective viewpoint, living for the good of all rather than merely that of one's self or of some special group. The Great Commandment approach to the question of the highest good takes care of that.

One thing that has often hindered progress is the tendency of people to assume that when all their wants are satisfied the highest good has been achieved for all mankind. They do not realize that their wants fall far short of their deeper and truer needs, and that how they feel about things may not apply to others. The butterfly on the road is not in a position where he has the right to preach contentment to the toad under the teeth of the harrow.

If you disregard the rights and interests of others and seek your own good

on a basis of self-interest, you may think you have succeeded, but it will only be for awhile. Advantages wrongfully taken have a way of failing as time goes on, and the one who has taken them finds that he has lost rather than gained.

The philosophers of ancient Greece, especially Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, applied their gifted minds much to this problem of the highest good. As the Hebrews had associated it with the idea of justice, the Greeks seemed to associate it more with the idea of virtue. By justice the Hebrews meant righteousness. By virtue the Greeks probably meant some quality of personal excellence, maybe something quite close to the Hebrew idea of justice or righteousness.

The New Testament gives us a more positive and dynamic idea of what virtue really is. When a sick woman touched the hem of the robe of Jesus as He passed, meaning to do it secretly, He knew it at once. How? He said He perceived that virtue had gone out from Him. This means that virtue is not just a passive personal quality, but an active force that a good life gives off as a luminous body gives off light or an electrode gives off power.

The more one studies the teachings of Jesus the more he realizes that whatever the highest good is, it is not something that can exist out of relation to other people, nor is it something that can lie inactive and unused and continue to be possessed.



Now let us get very much down to earth on the whole matter of finding the highest good. Let us consider some of the most practical phases of the quest, how to go about it, and how to succeed in it:

Perhaps up to this point you feel that you do not fully understand what the highest good is. Do not let that stop you. You do not know what electricity is, but that does not keep you from having your house wired. You do not know what water is, but you still turn on the faucet. You do not know what light is, but you still try to get out into the sunshine. The way to find out what the highest good is is by search, practice, and attainment. If now and then you find yourself at the end of a blind road, don't be discouraged. Turn back patiently, and try another way. Trial and error play a large part in all great discovery.

Suppose we start with the Great Commandment. We can hardly expect to find the highest good without figuring into the equation the love toward God and man. Whatever the measure of its importance or the distance it will take us, it makes an ideal starting point.

How can you love God whom you have not seen? That will not be a problem if you will be simple and down-to-earth about it. We all know people whose fathers died before they were born, and yet who cherish deep affection for these parents they have never seen. Even romance sometimes blossoms between people before they ever see each other. That is nothing impossible, or even uncommon. When you think of the love and goodness of God, and consider all He has done for you and the world you live in, how can you help but love Him? You would cherish a deep and abiding affection for any human being who did one thousandth as much for you.

In the process of learning to love the God who is Infinite Spirit you will also grow in understanding of what infinite spirit is. That in itself will EXTEND your horizons and help you find your way into the world of faith and understanding in comparison with which the world of sense, to which people are so closely chained, is only a back yard with a HIGH fence around it. When you reach the point where your mind can find its way around in the realm of unseen yet REAL facts and values you will really have taken a long step forward.

We now come to the matter of loving your neighbor as yourself. That presents no mysteries. There is no question about your neighbor's existence. Even the physical senses recognize his reality. Loving your neighbor as yourself is a different kind of problem, but it is still a problem.

Perhaps for some it would be well if the formula were slightly rephrased. Possibly there are people who find it hard to realize how they could love their neighbor as they do themselves because they love themselves altogether too much. Perhaps then one might begin at least by loving his neighbor as much as one has any right to love himself. Remember how the Master put it - if any man would come after Him, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Him.

But remember that this has no reference to any particular neighbor in any particular place. It has no reference either to any group, race, or class. It refers to the human brotherhood as a whole. It should not be hard to accept all human beings as our neighbors, but some have gone pretty far in limiting their interests and sympathies, so it is possible that for them the keeping of the Great Commandment may have to be arrived at step by step. Here are some of the paths leading in that direction:

1. Think of the world as a neighborhood and all peoples as neighbors. This has no reference to the intermarriage of races or the crowding into one place or condition of incompatible groups. It only means to realize and act upon the fact that the human race is a brotherhood with a Common Creator. We might as well face the fact at once, for it will thrust itself upon us till we do. We will never be rid of war, national rivalries, opposing ideologies, economic strife, poverty, and the rest of our problems of relationship until we adjust our lives and way of doing things to the idea that the human race is a family and the earth its home. Brothers cooperate, work for the common good, and defend and help each other. Members of a family try to keep the home attractive and livable, thinking of it as a place to build up, conserve, and beautify rather than one to ravage and exploit.

2. Remove social, economic, religious, and all other cleavages from your thinking. Leave them out of consideration. They are barriers to your own highest good and that of the race, or any unit of it. They are un-Christian because they breed ill will and conflict, and they are un-American because they look to the advantage of one by the disadvantage of another, whereas a democracy undertakes to conserve the interests of all. If it stretches your heart a little to squeeze all mankind into it, don't be alarmed. It may have needed a little distending anyway. It will adjust itself, and feel all the better for the change.

3. If you are now trying to do good to others, try to do more good to a still greater number. If not, begin now trying to do as much as you can for as many as you can. This does not mean to pick out your favorites and be kind to

them. It means to be kind and helpful to ALL kinds of people, and you will find it a very wholesome exercise to be especially kind and helpful to those you do not know or to those you thought you did not like. You may find yourself liking them very much before you are through. A good rule is this: Wherever you go, try to right anything that is wrong. Whomever you meet, try to leave them stronger, more cheerful, and more courageous. Whatever need you see, try to relieve it.

4. Don't worry about yourself. The more you forget it the happier and better off you will be. Never worry about its getting all the consideration it requires. The flesh will see to that, but rest assured that you will always be doing yourself a kindness when you are discharging your obligation to others. Put yourself in their places. Consider their viewpoints. Think how you would feel and what you would want if the situation were reversed. We are like individual cells in an organism. We serve our own best interests by helping to keep the organism strong and well.

5. If there are chips on your shoulders, get them off. If there are none, keep them off. A wise man has said that a chip on a man's shoulder shows what his head is made of. Most strife, all the way from personal feuds to great wars, start with chips on shoulders. If you carry one, you may depend upon it as a certainty that it will ultimately involve you in open conflict. Do not let chips on other people's shoulders make you resentful either. Smile with wonder that human beings can be so foolish, and go your way. You have nothing to gain and everything to lose by so much as recognizing the existence of these belligerent symbols.

6. Drop "revenge" from your vocabulary. You do not need it. No one does. When you desire revenge it is only because the poisonous secretions of your anger glands are still toxic in your brain. If you act while your brain cells are thus chemically affected, you will regret it later. If you wait until the poison is carried away, you will no longer want revenge. No man is fit to act in a matter of personal difference until this point is reached. Conflict seldom starts after that. Remember that revenge is not your business. The law of Karma balances out all evil and all good. "Vengeance is mine. I will repay", saith the Lord.

7. If anyone uses you spitefully, there is a sure way to get ahead of him. Jesus tells about it in the last of the Beatitudes. He says to pray for him. Some would say that is a ridiculous proposition, but who are they to say so? They are the people who have never tried it. Don't reject it until you TRY IT. The next time someone hurts you, go quietly away and as soon as you have a suitable condition for prayer, bear that person to the throne of grace. Do it sincerely. Do not ask for vengeance against him, but for the divine blessing on him. Ask God to lead you and defend you from any unjust judgment of another. Then leave the whole matter in the Father's hands, and quietly await the outcome. If you have done all this in the right spirit you will be amazed and delighted with the results. Do not ask or expect God to smite anyone for having offended you. He usually does something better than that. He usually makes a friend of the enemy who has caused the trouble.

8. Do not deny forgiveness, and do not forgive others grudgingly. Forgive readily and gladly, without even waiting to be asked to forgive. You cannot afford not to, for resentment is poison in both soul and body. Its continued presence will not necessarily harm anyone else, but it will do you a very great harm. Remember how the Lord's Prayer implies that one has a right to ask divine forgiveness only

in that measure in which he has already forgiven others in his heart. You can afford to forgive people. Most of them do not really mean any harm by what they do. If Jesus could forgive those who crucified Him, surely you can forgive those who are guilty of some little human hurt or neglect, and for the same reason - they do not know what they are doing.

Will following these roads bring you to your highest good? Undoubtedly they will take you far in that direction. You know how highways turn and cross, but there is always a road to the right place. You will find it and arrive, if you keep trying honestly.

When you find your good you may not recognize it at first. Don't be blind to it, and don't reject it if you find it is not what you expected. God knows what your good is, better than you. Accept it, give thanks for it, use it. One day you will be grateful for it.

Remember that your highest good is only a part of that highest good for mankind which we must all desire and seek. The interest of no one of us must conflict with that. We must think, and pray, and work together till we all gladly share the best possible life in the best possible world.

Will you please give this your earnest thought? Until your next lecture arrives you can gain greatly by thorough consideration and practice of that which this lecture contains.

That you will now extend your horizons and that you will be rich in faith, love and understanding, together with your Companions tried and true, is my wish for you.

In Fraternal Love and Deep Affection,

Your Class Instructor

NOTE: The final unit of this series, The Seven Quests of Man, comes to you next. It is the culmination of the entire series, and it is expected that you will have advanced farther than you now realize, through the application of these teachings to your life. If you have not yet fully applied the Quest Teachings to your life, please review the other five lessons and make them a part of your life now.